



ALL YOUTH READY AT 21

Ensuring that every young person
is ready for college, work and life.



Policy Briefing
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Positive Youth Development

Connecticut's young people represent one of our state's most valuable assets. Yet, more than 25 percent of them have life circumstances that put them at risk for personal and academic failure, leading to futures where they may never connect with Connecticut's economic promise and become productive adults. According to the National Crime Prevention Council, every young person we lose to a life of crime and drugs costs society close to \$2 million.¹

More than ever policy makers need to invest in young people to ensure that they have the life skills and knowledge to make it in the new economy. National researchers estimate that: Only 43 percent of youth are doing well and 22 percent are having trouble.² The workforce for the next 40 years will be made up of today's youth. Our ability to compete in a global economy depends on our commitment to educate and nurture positive youth development.

We also know that the recession and lack of real economic recovery have hurt everyone, but have been especially hard on young people. "Hard Times in the New Millennium: The State of the Nation's Youth" reports that for all young people the new millennium has meant higher unemployment, slower wage growth and increased insecurity. For young African Americans and Latinos, the situation is even worse."³



Adolescence is the pivotal period between childhood and adulthood. It is the time when youth need to acquire the attitudes, competencies, values and social skills that will carry them forward to successful adulthood. It is also the

time when they need to avoid choices and behaviors that will limit their future potential. Parents, friends, neighborhood, school and community all have an important role to play in the journey of youth to adulthood.

New Policy Direction

A Positive Youth Development framework seeks to create comprehensive, coordinated youth development services that incorporate best practices in policy and budget priorities focused on clearly defined developmentally appropriate outcomes for youth instead of focusing on "fixing" problems.



Public Act No. 03-145 states specific prevention and youth development outcomes for children and youth. Outcomes include:

- Every child is born healthy;
- Every child is ready for school;
- Every child and youth succeeds in school;
- Every child and youth is safe;
- Every youth chooses healthy behaviors; and
- Every youth is ready for the workforce.

Connecticut Goals state that all youth have:

- Access to resources that promote optimal physical and mental health;
- Nurturing relationships with adults and positive relationships with peers;
- Access to safe places for living and working;
- Access to educational and economic opportunity; and
- Access to structured activities and opportunity for community service and civic participation.



In summary, achieving our goal policies will embed a holistic view of helping youth to realize their full potential by increased coordination among state and local programs, by implementing a results oriented system of accountability focused on positive youth outcomes and by grounding our work in the principle of opportunities for youth and community empowerment.

Profile of the Health, Safety and Academic Achievement of Connecticut's Youth

There are 458,241 youth in Connecticut ages 10-19.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse

- By their sophomore year in high school, 79 percent of Connecticut's students have used alcohol, 43 percent have used marijuana and 17 percent have used inhalants.
- 24 percent of Connecticut's 8th graders have used marijuana in the last 30 days. 23 percent of 9-10th graders have used marijuana in the last 30 days.
- Connecticut's children first use alcohol at age 11 and marijuana at age 12. This is a full 1-2 years earlier than their peers nationally.
- While most categories of violence among youth are down, several areas, such as bullying, chronic discipline problems and threats of violence remain disturbingly high.⁴

Suspensions and Expulsions

- Approximately 35,147 students in grades pre-K through 12th grade were suspended during the 2003-04 school year.⁵

School Success

- 2005 CAPT statewide results demonstrate wide gaps in achievement among African-American, Latino and White youth in the 10th grade. The percent of students at or above grade level in reading: white - 87.5 percent; black - 55.6 percent; Hispanic - 56.3 percent.
- The 2004 cumulative drop out rate was 8.8 percent but in our most at risk districts (Educational Reference Group I (ERG I) the rate is more than 20 percent.⁶
- In 2004, 25 percent or about 10,000 of Connecticut's 8th graders scored below proficiency level in reading.⁷



Poverty

- 78,500 children, or 10 percent, live in at or below the Federal Poverty level.⁸
- 25 percent of African-American children are poor.
- 31 percent of Latino children are poor, the seventh highest rate of poverty among Hispanic children in the nation.
- 58 percent of the state's poor children live in seven school districts: Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, Waterbury, New Britain, New London and Windham.⁹

Juvenile Justice

- Connecticut has an estimated minority youth population of 26 percent. However, in 1997, minority youth comprised 77 percent of detention placements and 83 percent of commitments to facilities.
- Connecticut's custody rate for black juveniles is the highest in the country, 2,143 black juveniles in custody per 100,000 and the

custody rate for Latino juveniles is the second highest in the country, 1,243 per 100,000.

- Juvenile referrals to court in Connecticut have risen 79 percent since 1989 even though juvenile crime has been decreasing.¹⁰



Existing Successful Initiatives

Embedding positive youth development in the fabric of public policy in Connecticut must build on existing successful and innovative programs targeted to youth.

Initiatives include:

- The State After School Initiative led by the State Department of Education that established a non-profit After School Intermediary to coordinate and expand after school opportunities for school age children and youth in communities.



- Connecticut Employment and Training Commission (CETC) Youth Committee and Youth Vision Team collaborate to address issues related to serving the state's at-risk and needy youth and enabling them to prepare for participation in the workforce.
- Connecticut Jim Casey Foundation youth opportunities initiative (JCYOI) focuses on building youth learning and work skills and financial assets for foster youth approaching independence.
- Connecticut Youth Spirit Awards, an annual celebration of Connecticut youth who have faced and overcome great challenges, emerged resilient and given back to their communities.



- Connecticut for Community Youth Development (CCYD) led by the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee with the Office of Policy and Management established a statewide coalition committed to strengthen and support youth-serving providers by directing capacity-building efforts simultaneously at the statewide agencies, regional networks, and local organizations that serve youth. Accomplishments include a partnership of public/private funders focused on youth outcomes, support and linkage to local efforts and dissemination of resource materials to enhance local programs.
- Regional Substance Abuse Action Councils- led by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. RAC's are private/public partnerships with community leaders charged with establishing and implementing substance abuse prevention activities.



- Governor's Prevention Partnership, established in 1989, is a non-profit, public/private partnership whose goal is to keep Connecticut's youth safe, successful and drug-free by creating and supporting local youth development programs.



- The Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance focuses on systemic improvement of juvenile justice services in Connecticut.
- The State Juvenile Justice Reform Plan led by the Department of Children and Families and the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch focuses on building community based services to ensure that youth have a support system in place that helps youth connect with caring adults, job training, education and opportunities for youth leadership and civic involvement.
- The closing of the Connecticut Juvenile Training School and the placement of youth in appropriate positive settings focused on the health, education and developmental needs of youth.



Call to Action

Youth development is an approach to structuring services, systems and supports for youth so that young people develop skills and competencies to thrive and enter adulthood ready to face the challenges of adult life.¹¹

Create a New Paradigm

Coordination: Ensure that there are mechanisms and infrastructures for increased communication, connection and integration across youth services to increase effectiveness.

Accountability: Ensure that all state youth services work from a common vision for success of Connecticut's youth and positive youth outcomes guide strategic planning and document results.

Opportunities: Develop strategies to increase the involvement of young people in meaningful roles within youth services, school, community and decision-making bodies.



The problems and challenges that our young people face today do not develop in isolation. Our efforts to address these problems can no longer work in isolation. Youth development policies can help states raise educational achievement. They can advance states' efforts to develop a vibrant workforce, as youth with good inter-personal skills (e.g., teamwork,

communication, problem solving, flexibility) fare better in the labor market, contribute to the life of the community and become successful adults. Investment in positive youth development creates the promise for improving the lives of our State's future parents, citizens and workers.



“Kids beating the odds is not magic. It is committed youth, parents, communities and policymakers changing the odds.”

Karen Pittman, *Changing the Odds, Youth Today*, 1995

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¹ The Governor's Prevention Partnership, Keeping CT's Youth Safe, Successful and Drug Free, 2004.

² The Ready by 21 Challenge: Karen Pittman, The Forum for Youth Investment, 9-8-05

³ Center for Economic Policy Report, Boushey, 2005.

⁴ The Governor's Prevention Partnership Survey on Youth Violence, 2002.

⁵ Discipline Offense Record, State Department of Education, 03-04.

⁶ Connecticut State Department of Education web site

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Federal Poverty Levels living at 100 percent of the poverty level include: family of 3-\$16,090, family of 4-\$19,350 graduated to \$32,390 for a family of 8.

⁹ Connecticut Association of Human Services, Pathways from Poverty for Connecticut Children, March 2005

¹⁰ Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, Fast Facts

¹¹ Positive Youth Development: A Pathway to Healthy Teens, Grantmakers in Health, December 200